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ABSTRACT

Minority and white students at an urban university were compared on roles and on the correlates of overall satisfaction with the university and retention. The sample consisted of 1,497 undergraduates: 1,370 white students, 148 black students, 20 Native Americans, and 14 Hispanics. The black, Hispanic, and Native American students were combined to form a minority category. For the 520 freshmen and sophomores, data were obtained on retention for the fall 1985 semester. Minority women had relatively high role demands; a higher percentage had children than did white women. Minority men's role demands were less since a higher percentage were part-time students than were white men. For minority women, the helpfulness of university staff (advisers/secretaries and bookstore/parking/cashier staff) was correlated with overall satisfaction with the university. Retention was related to grades and to financial factors. For white men, these factors were full-time student status, few or no children, short or no working hours, and use of financial aid, while for women, living with parents was a factor. For women, parenthood was not related to dropping out of the university. (SW)

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Role Demands and College Experiences of Minority and White Men and Women

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Ann K. Dickey, Chair
Forum Publications Editorial
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Abstract

Minority and white students at an urban university were compared on roles and on the correlates of overall satisfaction with the university and retention. Minority women had relatively high role demands; a higher percentage had children than did white women. Minority men's role demands were less, as a higher percentage were parttime students than were white men. For minority women, the helpfulness of university staff (advisers/secretaries and bookstore/parking/cashier) was correlated with overall satisfaction with the university. Retention was related to grades and to financial factors (for white men, fulltime student status, few or no children, short or no working hours, and use of financial aid; for white women, living with parents). For women, parenthood was not related to dropping out of the university.

Relatively little research has been done on satisfaction with college, defined by Bean (1984) as "a pleasurable emotional state resulting from a person's enactment of the role of being a student." Bean (1984) found that academic integration was the major determinant of satisfaction for men. Academic integration involved motivation to study, interest in the academic program, and confidence in the ability to be a successful student. For women, institutional fit was the most important determinant of satisfaction. Institutional fit involved a feeling of belonging at the university, and ability to control one's academic life. Bean concluded that social factors were more important for women than for men.

Survey research has indicated that minority students are less satisfied with their college experiences than white students. In a review of the literature on minority students in higher education, Fleming (1981) identified several problem areas: social isolation, racial prejudice, and difficulty in relationships with faculty.

Most of the research on student retention has been based on a theory formulated by Tinto (1974). Tinto reviewed previous research and proposed that student retention depends on (1) academic integration, the extent to which the student is part of the academic life of the college, as indicated by grades and perceived intellectual development, and (2) social integration, the extent to which the student is a part of the social life of the college community, including both students and faculty. At commuter

universities, academic integration is positively related to retention, but social integration is unrelated or negatively related to retention (Pascarella & Chapman, 1983); Pascarella, Duby, & Iverson, 1983).

However, as Tinto (1982) has pointed out, his model focuses on the student's interaction with the institution. It does not include external factors which might impact on retention, such as outside commitments to job and family which are important in the lives of commuter students.

The present study utilized data from a survey of urban university minority and white students. Outside roles and experiences with university faculty and staff were related to satisfaction with the university and to retention.

Method

Sample. A random sample of classes was chosen in a major urban university. (A slight oversampling of classes in Afro-American Studies and the Department of Educational Opportunity, was done to get more minority and disadvantaged students.) The instructors for the chosen classes were asked if a questionnaire could be distributed in their classes, and virtually all agreed. The questionnaire was administered during a regular class period. Students could refuse to answer it, but none did. The 1497 undergraduates in the sample included 1370 white students, 148 black students, 20 Native Americans, and 14 Hispanics. The black, Hispanic, and Native American students were combined to form a minority category. Foreign students were

omitted.

For freshmen and sophomores, data was obtained on retention to the fall, 1985 semester. These students included 445 white students and 75 minority students.

Instrument.[2] The questionnaire included demographic questions and questions about student goals and aspirations, awareness and use of services, social life, and overall satisfaction with the university. In addition, the students were presented with a list of staff people (professors in and outside their major, staff and peer advisors, secretaries, teaching assistants, maintenance workers, cafeteria workers) and university facilities (admissions office, registration office, cashier's office, bookstore, parking, and police/security). The students were asked to rate each on a four-point scale ranging from "very frustrating" to "very helpful."

The Students' 1979-80 Grade Point Average was computed from grades obtained from university files.

Retention.[3] For the freshmen and sophomores, data on retention until the fall, 1985 semester was obtained from university files. A retention score was created as follows: 1 = dropped out, 2 = enrolled during the fall 1985 semester, and 3 = graduated by fall 1985.

Analysis. The helpfulness ratings were factor analyzed by the principle components method, with a varimax rotation. The analysis yielded four factors: (1) professors (in and outside of major), (2) advisors (staff and peer) and secretaries; (3) admissions and registration

offices; and (4) bookstore, parking and cashier's office. As all students did not interact with all staff members and facilities, factor scores were obtained by computing an average of the helpfulness ratings of the staff members and facilities that the student did interact with.

Differences among the sex-ethnicity subsamples were assessed with analyses of variance and t-tests.

Independent variables involving demographic characteristics and student experiences were correlated with overall satisfaction with the university and with retention until fall, 1985. The independent variables were college class (freshman = 1, sophomore = 2), marital status (single = 1, married = 2); number of children, residence (not with parents = 1, with parents = 2), student status (parttime = 1, fulltime = 2), hours worked (1 = none, 2 = less than 20, 3 = 20-35, and 4 = 36 or more hours per week), use of financial aid services (1 = never, 2 = less than once a semester, 3 = once a semester or more), and helpfulness of professors, advisors/secretaries, admissions/ registration, and bookstore/parking/cashier. Pearson product moment correlations were computed between these variables and (a) overall satisfaction with the university, and (b) retention until the fall, 1985 semester. The correlations with satisfaction involved data from all four college classes. The correlations with retention involved only the data on the 1980 freshmen and sophomores, since most students continue after they reach the junior year.

Results

Student Roles

In order to assess the major role demands on students in the present study, part- vs. fulltime student status was examined in relation to low employment (working less than 20 hours a week) versus high employment (working 20 hours a week or more). (Astin (1975) found that working less than 20 hours a week had a possible effect on retention, but working more than 25 hours was detrimental.) The percentages of minority and white men and women in each category are shown in Table 1.[1] Differences in percentages among the four subsamples were tested with a method suggested by Davies (1962).

Traditional students, fulltime students with no children and low levels of employment, were able to devote most of their time to college. This category was the largest for all four sex-ethnicity subsamples. Slightly over half of the minority men and white men and women fell into that category. Significantly fewer of the minority women (37%) than white women (59%) were in the traditional college student role.

However, there were differences among the four subsamples in the second largest category. For minority women, the second largest category (22%) was the student-parent category, that is, full-time students who had one or more children and who worked less than 20 hours a week. Significantly more minority women were in this category than were members of the other sex-ethnicity subsamples.

For minority men, the second largest category was parttime students who had no children but who worked 20 hours a week or more. Significantly more minority men were in that category than were white men. For the white men and women, the second largest category was fulltime students with no children but with heavy workloads. About a fourth fell into that category, significantly more than the minority women.

All other categories were relatively small: less than 15% for all subsamples.

Percentages of students with high role demands were obtained by summing the percentages of fulltime students with a high level of employment, at least one child, or both. This percentage was highest for minority women: 40%. For white men and women, it was about 30%. For minority men, it was 19%. (The differences between the minority women and the other subsamples were significant at the .05 level or better.) In other words, because of the high percentage with one or more children, minority women did have higher role demands than did white students.

In summary, minority men and women tended to experience different role demands. Minority women had the heaviest role demands of the four sex-ethnicity subsamples. Fewer were in the traditional student role (fulltime students with no children and low levels of employment). More of them were fulltime students with at least one child.

Among minority males, a relatively high percentage were parttime students with high levels of employment.

Their role demands (combining job, college, and parenthood) tended to be less than those of white students.

To determine whether students' role demands changed over the four years of college, Pearson r's were computed between college class and number of children, part- versus fulltime student status, and under 20 versus over 20 hours worked per week. For white men and women and for minority women, none of the variables was related to college class. For minority men, hours worked per week was correlated .40 ($p < .001$) with college class, and fulltime status was correlated -.25 ($p < .05$) with college class. In other words, as minority males advanced academically, they took on heavier workloads and were more likely to attend UWM part-time. Of the minority male freshmen, 83% were fulltime students; of the seniors, only 53% were fulltime.

Overall Satisfaction with the University

Analyses of Variance. In an ethnicity by sex by student status (part vs. fulltime) analysis of variance, minority students were significantly lower in overall satisfaction with the university ($p < .001$). The difference, although highly significant due to the large number of white students, was small. Also, the ethnicity by sex interaction was significant at the .05 level. Minority women were particularly low in satisfaction.

The same analyses of variance were performed with each of the faculty-staff helpfulness scores as the dependent variables. The few significant results were: Minority students rated professors as significantly less helpful than

white students did ($p < .001$). The difference was slight, and may not have much practical meaning even though it was significant because of the large number of cases.
With helpfulness of advisers/secretaries as the dependent variable, the ethnicity by student status interaction was significant at the .05 level. The small number of parttime minority students were particularly low in their ratings of the helpfulness of advisers/secretaries. Because the analyses of variance involved 35 separate significance tests (seven main effects and interactions for five dependent variables), this result may have occurred by chance. It was concluded that with the exception of professors, there were virtually no significant differences in minority and white students' perceptions of faculty and staff helpfulness.

Correlates of Satisfaction. The correlations of the helpfulness variables with overall satisfaction with the university are shown in Table 2. Because of the large number of white students, virtually all of the correlations for them were significant. However, there were differences in the level of correlations. For three of the four subsamples, professor helpfulness was the variable most highly correlated with overall satisfaction. For minority women, adviser/secretary helpfulness was most highly correlated with satisfaction, and significantly more so than for white women and for minority men. Bookstore/parking/cashier were significantly more highly correlated with over-

all satisfaction for minority women than for white women. The same comparison for minority vs. white men approached significance ($p < .10$).

1979-80 GPA was only available for the freshmen and sophomores. GPA was significantly correlated with satisfaction for white men and women ($r = .29$ and .24 respectively, $p < .001$) and approached significance for minority women ($r = .24$, p between .05 and .10).

The other independent variables were almost all unrelated to satisfaction with the university. However, for minority men, number of children was negatively related to satisfaction ($r = -.28$, $p < .05$).

Retention

Of the freshmen and sophomores in the original study, the percentage who had graduated by fall, 1985 was, for the white men, 44%; for white women, 53%; for minority men, 36%, and for minority women, 21%. In all sex-ethnicity subsamples, less than 15% were still enrolled.

Correlates of Retention

For the freshmen and sophomores, the correlations between the independent variables and retention until fall, 1985 are shown in Table 3. 1979-80 GPA was significantly correlated with retention for all subsamples except the minority men. Fulltime status was significantly correlated with retention for white men and women. For white men, retention was significantly correlated with fewer or no children, with shorter working hours, and with use of financial aid services. For white women, retention was

significantly correlated with living with parents. The samples of minority men and women were very small. For minority men, none of the variables were significantly correlated with retention. For minority women, GPA was the only significant correlate. However, there was no evidence that marriage and parenthood led to dropping out. In fact, there was a nonsignificant tendency for minority married women and minority women with children to be more likely to be retained (rs = .14 and .17 respectively, p between .10 and .20).

Discussion

Overall satisfaction with the university was a function of grades and personal relationships. For white students, the helpfulness of professors and advisers/secretaries were correlated with satisfaction. In other words, for white students satisfaction was related to the academically related contacts with faculty and staff, and to academic success. (Bean (1984) believes that satisfaction causes high grades more than the reverse.)

For minority women, helpfulness of advisers/secretaries was highly correlated with satisfaction, more so than for minority men or for white women. This finding may indicate the importance of individualized counseling and personal support to minority women, paralleling the importance of institutional fit (a feeling of belonging and control) which Bean (1984) found highly related to satisfaction for women. Bean thought that the social aspects of college may be

particularly important for women; this may be especially true for minority women, given the feelings of not being "entitled" to college which many minority students experience (Nieves, 1978).

The relationship of helpfulness of bookstore/parking/cashier to minority women's and to some extent, minority men's satisfaction is more difficult to interprete. It is possible that dealing with the university bureaucracy and with financial issues are particularly important to minority students. A white student having a problem with the bureaucracy may simply be annoyed; a minority student may perceive racial prejudice and his or her overall satisfaction with the university may be more adversely affected than that of the white student.

The variables that were related to satisfaction were, in general, not related to retention. The faculty/staff helpfulness scores were not significantly correlated with retention, for any of the four sex-ethnicity subsamples. Much of the research on retention has emphasized the importance of supportive interpersonal relationships with faculty and staff (good advising, etc.). It is understandable and desirable that they should be emphasized, as they are under the control of the university. However, in the urban university supportive relationships may be less important than financial factors for retention.

The minority samples were small, and there were virtually no significant correlates of retention. For white students, grades and economic factors were the main

correlates of retention. For white men, number of children, long work hours and parttime student status were related to dropping out; use of financial aid services was related to persistence. In other words, for white men dropping out was related to assumption of the role of parent and breadwinner, and to working rather than relying on financial aid. For white women, there was no obvious influence of financial factors on retention. However, the positive correlation between residence with parents and retention may indicate the importance of financial factors. Most research on student retention has found dorm residence to be related to retention, probably because it facilitates student involvement and social integration. However, many women probably attend a commuter university in order to save money, and the social advantages of oncampus residence may be outweighed by the financial advantages of living at home.

Implications

Although faculty are important, the study indicates the importance of relationships with other university staff to minority students. The helpfulness of advisors/secretaries was particularly related to minority women's satisfaction with the university. The fact that secretary helpfulness loaded on the same factor as adviser helpfulness indicates that secretaries play an important role in giving information to students. The correlations of bookstore/ parking/cashier helpfulness with minority student satisfaction provides evidence for the importance of the

total university social climate to minority students. Universities might pay more attention to the role of nonacademic staff and how their interactions with students can be made more beneficial.

Some commuter universities are encouraging dormitory residence as a way of increasing student involvement. Dorm residence should be recommended with caution; it should not be encouraged for students, particularly women, who may need the financial savings of living at home.

The concept of working one's way through college is part of the American tradition of opportunity. However, men students in particular should realize that parttime college attendence and long working hours make it difficult to finish college. They should be advised that some use of financial aid would increase their likelihood of graduation. On the national policy level, cuts in financial aid should be resisted.

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Footnotes

[1] Parttime students were probably underrepresented in the study, since they would be less likely to be in classes where the questionnaire was administered. This source of sample bias would affect all four subsamples equally, however.

[2] The authors are indebted to Darryl Draeger for creating the SPSS file from the questionnaire data.

[3] The authors are indebted to Paul F. Fischer of the Office of Institutional Research for providing the GPA and retention data.

Table 1. Student, Job, and Parent Roles of Minority and White Students

Roles	Males		Females	
	Minorities	Whites	Minorities	Whites
Full-time students				
No children				
Low employment[a]	51%	57%	37%[c]	59%[c]
High employment[b]	12	27	13	22
Child(ren)				
Low employment	5	2	22[d]	5
High employment	2	1	5	1
Subtotal	70%	87%	77%	87%
Part-time students				
No children				
Low employment	3	2	4	3
High employment	18[e]	8[e]	9	7
Child(ren)				
Low employment	0	0	3	2
High employment	8	2	6	1
Subtotal	29%	12%	22%	13%
Total	99%	99%	99%	100%
Base N	65	593	114	682

[a]Less than 20 hours/week.

[b]20 hours /week or more.

[c]Comparison significant, $p < .01$.

[d]Significantly different from other subsamples, $p < .01$.

[e]Comparison significant, $p < .01$.

Table 2

Correlations of Helpfulness Ratings with Overall Satisfaction with the University for the Total Sample (Pearson r's) [a]

Staff persons or facilities	Males		Females	
	Minorities	Whites	Minorities	Whites
Professors	.47** (41)	.29*** (394)	.27* (65)	.37*** (519)
Advisors, secretaries	.04[b] (40)	.28*** (385)	.46***[bc] (74)	.22***[c] (518)
Admissions, registration	.31* (47)	.21***[b] (437)	.19* (81)	.06[b] (548)
Bookstore, parking, cashier	.37** (50)	.08* (488)	.33**[c] (89)	.10**[c] (596)

[a] N's are in parentheses

*p < .05

**p < .01

***p < .001

[b,c] Difference between correlations significant, p < .05

Table 3

Correlates of Retention for

Minorities and White Freshmen and Sophomores

(Pearson r's)

	Men		Women	
	Minorities (N = 24–28)	Whites (N = 178–192)	Minorities (N = 41–47)	Whites (N = 226–253)
Parents' education	.31[a]	.08	-.07	-.07
Marital status	-.07	-.08	.14[b]	.01
Number of children	-.02	-.14*	.17[b]	.02
Residence (with parents)	.12	-.04	-.01	.17**
Hours worked	.00	-.20**	.00	.03
Part- vs. fulltime student	.30[a]	.23**	-.08	.11*
Use of financial aid	-.01	.14*	.12	-.05
1979–80 GPA	.19	.34***	.31*	.26***
Satisfaction with university	.07	.26***	.15	.18**
Helpfulness				
Professors	.12	.02	-.10	.08
Advisers/secretaries	.23[b]	.02	.06	.09[a]
Admissions/registration	.06	.06	.11	-.05
Bookstore/parking/cashier	.00	-.02	-.01	.01

*p < .05

**p < .01

***p < .001

[a]p < .10, > .05

[b]p < .20, > .10

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